

FEB 1952 31-4AA

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CLASSIFICATION **CONFIDENTIAL**

INFORMATION REPORT

REPORT NO.

CD NO.

DATE DISTR.

NO. OF PAGES 3

NO. OF ENCLS. 3(3 pages)
(LISTED BELOW)

SUPPLEMENT TO
REPORT NO.

COUNTRY USSR (Kaliningrad Oblast)

SUBJECT Transloading Facilities at Chernyakhovsk
and Birkenfeld

Document No.

No Change in

Design:

Class. () TS 300

Auth.: HQ 75-2

Date: AUG 29 1978

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1. In East Prussia, facilities for transloading from standard to Soviet gauge are available only on the Poznan-Olshtyn-Korshe-Zheleznodorozhnyy (54-21N, 21-19E)-Chernyakhovsk (54-38N, 21-49E) line near Chernyakhovsk. The freight station in Chernyakhovsk was converted into a transloading point, and a new transloading station was established in Birkenfeld, five km southwest of Chernyakhovsk station on the Chernyakhovsk-Zheleznodorozhnyy line. Both Soviet-gauge and combined Soviet-standard-gauge lines lead into the Chernyakhovsk area from the east. There are the double-track, Soviet-gauge Sovetsk (55-03N, 21-54E)-Chernyakhovsk line; the Chernyakhovsk-Birkenfeld line, which has a Soviet-gauge and a standard-gauge track; the standard-gauge, single-track Birkenfeld-Zheleznodorozhnyy line, and the Chernyakhovsk-Kaliningrad line, which is believed to have two Soviet-gauge tracks. However, according to some sources, the latter line has both Soviet-gauge and standard-gauge tracks.

Chernyakhovsk Transloading Point

2. Chernyakhovsk is the junction of the Poznan-Riga and the Kaliningrad-Vilnius trunk lines. In the summer of 1945, the Chernyakhovsk station, which had about 20 tracks, was converted into a freight transloading point. The station area is about 900x400m. The installations include: a station building, which is still in ruins; an engine shed; a concrete loading-ramp 300 meters long, six to eight meters wide, and 1.2 meters high; a wooden loading-ramp 280 meters long, 1.5 meters wide, and 1.2 meters high; a cart road; an engine house for a 110-ton crane; an equipment storage room; a dayroom for railroad personnel; three mobile cranes with lifting capacities of from 6 to 18 tons; and a 110-ton crane manufactured at the Artelt Plant in Eberswalde. There are 25 tracks, including nine Soviet-gauge tracks.

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3. Until June 1949, all goods arriving at the station was transferred either by hand or by crane. Conversion of freight cars from standard to Soviet gauge was not observed. When goods were transloaded by hand, two workers were assigned to each standard-gauge car. They required, for the transloading of cement in sacks, one to two hours; of salt, one to two hours; of potash, four to five hours; of coal, five to six hours; of prefabricated houses, five to six hours; of timber, two to three hours. Transloading was done mainly by German PWs detained in [redacted] Chernyakhovsk. In an emergency, the Soviet labor battalion, Unit Mararov(sic), which had 360 to 380 men, and which was located in Chernyakhovsk in 1949, was also assigned to transloading work. After 1949, sugar was transloaded only by members of this labor battalion. Work was usually done in three shifts. Up to 1949 Soviet-gauge cars often were not available in adequate numbers. Until 1947-1948, these cars, among which were many converted German, Polish, Hungarian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian cars, were in poor condition. The condition of the cars improved during 1948. New, four-axle cars were frequently seen after 1948. A Soviet lieutenant colonel Petroshensko (fnu) supervised all transloading operations. Up to June 1949 an average of about 18 eastbound trains, loaded with goods of various types from the DDR, were transloaded every week. Most westbound trains were empty. Until August 1946, trains arriving from the west were operated by German personnel. However, since a large number of PWs and German civilians fled on these trains, German railroad personnel was no longer allowed to operate beyond Zheleznodorozhnyy, which is on the Soviet-Polish border. Most trains arriving in Chernyakhovsk from the DDR were escorted by military personnel.

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Birkenfeld Transloading Point

4. Birkenfeld transloading point was built by Soviet Construction Staff 45, with the help of German PWs, in the summer of 1945. Since the project covered an area of approximately 3,000x350 meters, almost none of the PWs was in a position to obtain a survey of the entire installation. The descriptions are therefore not absolutely reliable. Birkenfeld is a station where the goods arriving from the DDR are stored in the 84 large storage sheds before being forwarded according to type of goods and destination. The storage sheds, 30x15x3 meters in size, are arranged in six rows. A Soviet and a standard gauge, possibly in the form of a third rail, run between two rows of sheds. On the side facing the track the storage sheds have a loading ramp, with a road six to eight meters wide running along the opposite side of the building. The individual sheds are 20 meters apart. In the middle of both longitudinal sides of the sheds there is a sliding door four meters wide. The sheds have gable roofs which are covered with tar paper. The floors of the sheds consisted of crushed stone. The station area was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and the erection of a second fence was begun in 1947. Electric lights and spotlights were installed between the rows of storage sheds. The transloading station was guarded by Soviet soldiers. In addition to this new transloading station, there was a transloading point at the old, small Birkenfeld railroad station, which had two wooden loading-ramps, each about 200 meters long, a wide one for transloading medium loads, and a narrow one for light loads. In 1948 there were two German railroad cranes in Birkenfeld, operated by German PWs.
5. Most of the goods arriving at the railroad station was transloaded by hand. Conversion of freight cars from standard to Soviet gauge was not observed. An average of two loaded trains daily arrived from the DDR to be unloaded at Birkenfeld, while about seven eastbound trains were loaded every week. In 1945-1946, mostly German ammunition and artillery pieces were stored; in 1947, primarily foodstuffs and dismantled machinery, in addition to scrap, prefabricated huts, sugar, cement, and potash. Almost no goods arrived from the West. Until May 1948, when the PW camp in Birkenfeld was deactivated, about 250 PWs were available for transloading duties. Each train was unloaded or transloaded immediately after arrival. If PWs were not available in adequate numbers, Soviet soldiers were also employed for transloading operations.

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6. No information has been received on the other transloading points, because since 1946 German personnel has not been allowed to operate trains beyond Zheleznodorozhnyy, where they are taken over by Soviet train crews. In the Polish-Soviet agreement on Soviet transit traffic it was stated that a total of eight Soviet-interest trains, four in each direction, may pass through Zheleznodorozhnyy daily.

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[REDACTED] Comment. Coordinates in this report are approximate.

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1. [REDACTED] Comment: [REDACTED] this station has been completely restored.

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